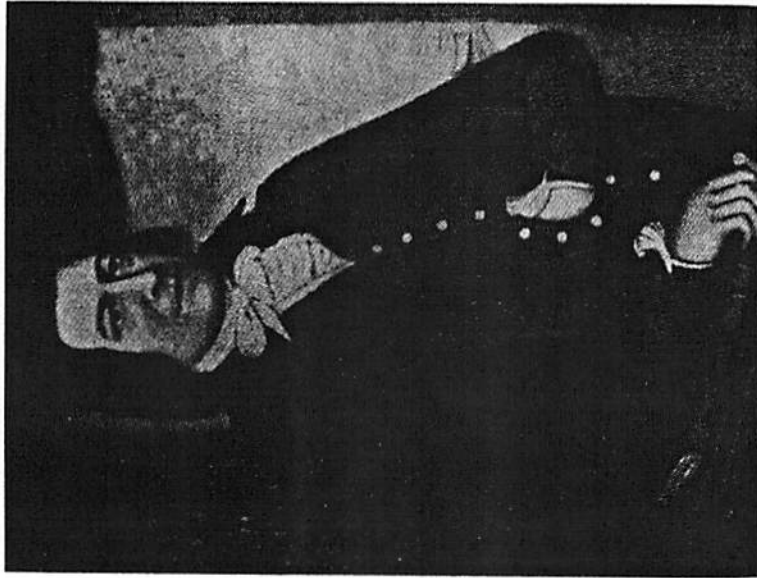


King Caesar

KING CAESAR

A Story of Colonial Duxbury
in Massachusetts



— Eliza Weston

A Foreword

A life-long interest in the preservation of New England traditions and historic lore has prompted Horace J. Martin of Cambridge to publish several booklets on Massachusetts communities. Now the fascinating tale of Duxbury's "King Caesar." After the reading of my prepared narrative and viewing Mrs. McKinney's proposed illustrations, Mr. Martin suggested the Duxbury Historical Society endeavor to raise funds and acquire what is a historic building in Duxbury for our ever-expanding museum, the King Caesar House. In July, 1965, a Town Committee started to campaign for funds for this purpose.

M. R. McKinney

Curator

KING CAESAR

Within a decade of the passing of King George the Third, and the birth of democratic America, the Old Colony, and especially Duxbury, had a new King in the making. Ezra Weston, possessed of little schooling, but with the business acumen of a Henry Ford, rose to eminence as America's far-famed builder and owner of shipping.

He started as an apprentice in the primitive shipyard in the lee of Captain's Hill which has been for nearly two centuries sacred to the memory of Myles Standish and, with the coming of the Revolutionary War, he rose with the shipping industry and was honored locally with the sobriquet of "King Caesar."

As an early organization genius he not only managed his shipping fleet and built ships but had his timber cruisers seeking ship timbers afar through the colony. A foundry, sail loft, rope walk and spar soak, plus a chain of local farms also needed his supervision.

It is said that instead of the current coffee

break in mid morning and afternoon it was his custom to issue rum to the workmen. King Caesar was highly appreciative of the labors of man and beast. Upon the death of "Dick," the horse which



had long turned the wheel of the rope walk, King Caesar himself had the faithful animal buried and the grave marked with the stone still visible near the junction of Powder Point Avenue and King Caesar Road.

Turning right at the fork of the road, the traveler is entering the domain of King Caesar called Powder Point. Tradition says that here the Indians saw the settlers planting small black

onion seeds and thought it was gunpowder. They bartered for some gunpowder and paddled over to the point and planted the "seeds" without result — hence the name, Powder Point.

East on King Caesar Road the shore line and



Bay View invite the artist's eye. The Bumpus Memorial Park marks the pier of King Caesar and nearby the site of the original King Caesar residence and the stately mansion built in 1809 with its charm within and without.

To the rear a "deep cellar" house, tradition says, was the terminus of an underground tunnel from the wharf. Its legend still survives that here

was kept the smuggled imports and, perhaps, escaping slaves from the southland.

King Caesar's ten-acre ship yard was just across the river a little distance from the bridge. In earlier years his smaller craft had been built near Captain's Hill where Weston began his ship building career about 1764. There, in 1720, Thomas Prince had built the first Duxbury vessel, a sloop, mostly of wild cherry.

King Caesar was a striking personality, possessed of many unusual characteristics and a dictatorial manner. On one occasion he tarried in Boston while his ship, with its anxious officers and crew, grew restless due to the ebbing tide and the mate sent a sailor ashore with this note to hasten matters.

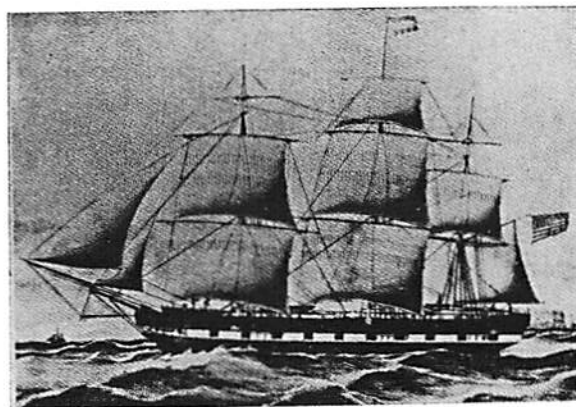
Note to Town Crier:

"Mr. Crier please to cry
A man which hath a light blue eye
A scarlet coat — a proper teaser
And is known by the name Old King Caesar"

Duxbury folk so admired the image of a local king that the title passed automatically to his son, Ezra II, who inherited not only the business

and the name of his father but the title of King Caesar II.

In 1833 his Duxbury Bank was chartered and a few years later it was known at home and abroad that the Weston Enterprise was the largest ship owner's enterprise in America and one of the largest in the world, and so stated by Lloyds of London.



In the year 1841 the largest Merchant Ship in New England, the "Hope," was built about opposite the Weston Pier on his ten-acre yard along

Blue Fish River. The picture of the "Hope" was exhibited at the World's Fair, Chicago, in 1893.

In his Saratoga Speech (August, 1840) Daniel Webster refers thus to his friend, King Caesar: "I live on the sea coast of New England and one of my neighbors is the largest ship owner, probably, in the United States. During the past year he has made what might suffice for two or three fortunes of moderate size."



Weston owned and controlled over fifty vessels in world-wide commerce. Webster stressed the marked advantage in favor of the shipowners who made money by being able to escape tax laws and bad money by trading in distant lands and taking big profit therefrom.

A self-fleeting windlass was patented Dec. 12, 1854, by Daniel L. Winsor of the Winsor family,

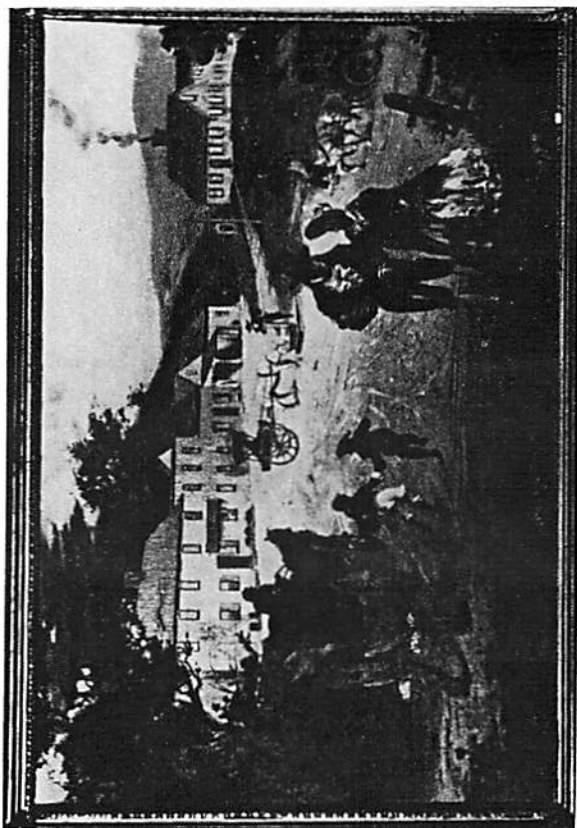
distinguished as ship builders, sea captains, craftsmen and in the field of history.

Samuel Winsor was building small craft at Clark's Island in Duxbury Bay by 1745 and in larger yards later. Some fourteen sea captains lent luster to the Winsor name in the heyday of Duxbury shipping. In 1869 Captain Henry Otis Winsor commanded the last full-rigged ship, the Samuel G. Reed, to be launched in Duxbury.

Daniel Webster was a frequent visitor to the town's historic Ford Store often referred to as the First Department Store in America. Tradition says he was fond of the storekeeper and was a valued assistant at times.

As yet inflation was unknown. A gallon of New England rum sold for thirty-nine cents and tobacco cost twenty cents a pound.

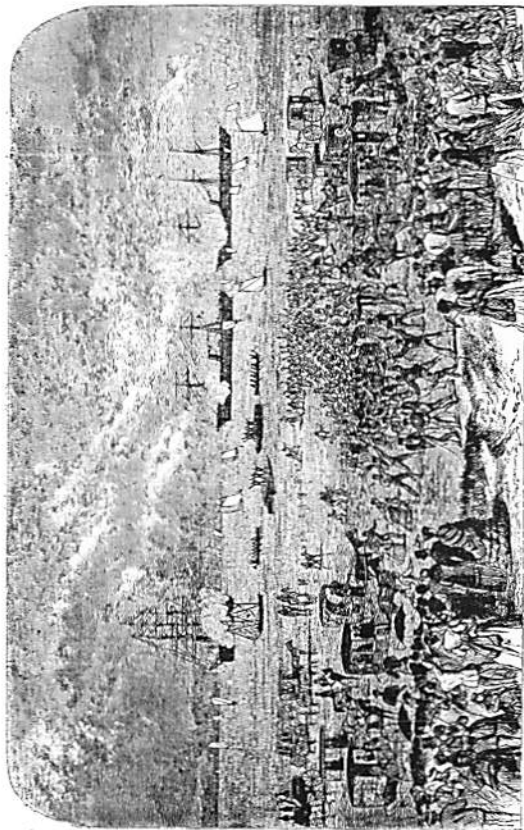
Neighbors were wont to gather here and perhaps it was at the store that Webster arranged with one Peterson for a fishing trip with this result: "After the fishing was over, he set out to return to Duxbury as he had come and on the way back they saw the Sea Serpent which answered to the common account of the creature. It passed directly across the bow, only six or



seven rods off and then disappeared." On the way home Webster, having time to reflect on what had occurred, at length said to Peterson, "For God's sake, never say a word about this to any one for if it should be known that I have seen the Sea Serpent I should never hear the last of it."



The historic "Cable House" was originally the bank of King Caesar, its usefulness ending with the decline of the shipping industry due to the coming of the Clipper Ships demanding deeper waters. The last ship built in the Duxbury yards was the Thomas A. Goddard, 715 tons, launched in 1874.



The Franco-American Cable from Brest, France, was the first telegraphic connection between America and the continent of Europe. It was pulled ashore at Duxbury Beach, July, 1869, and came via Abram's Hill direct to the Cable House. The toll charged was \$100 for twenty words.

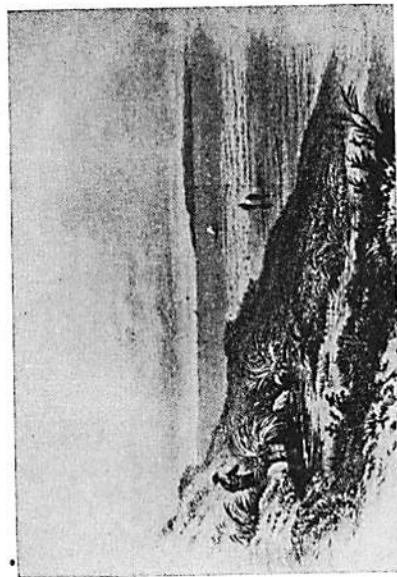
The Sandwich Glass Company, in celebration, featured a Cable Pattern in many pieces. Likewise the Haviland China produced the Duxbury pattern with the Cable design. Many of these pieces are on display in the Duxbury Historical Rooms.

Duxbury's shipping industry lined the shore from Captain's Hill to the banks of the Blue Fish River. It began by building small craft for fishermen and grew rapidly. At its zenith, one hundred captains were in command of Duxbury-built ships and some fifty skippers were making regular trips to the distant Banks.

King Caesar and his company stressed the larger vessels and ships for world-wide trade. In 1833 they built the famed "Mattakeesett" of 480 tons, largest in New England, and in 1841 the "Hope" which in 1850 loaded 3100 bales of cotton at New Orleans, a record in that day.

In 1817, when King Caesar I and his son Ezra were reigning supreme, they and a multitude of devotees of sail hailed the publication by Captain Amasa Delano of his widely read *Narrative of Voyages and Travels*. This volume not only charmed a Delano kindred in Washington, but was studied by certain writers in search of play and plot material which was appropriated, it seems.

Less classical but more salty, perhaps, are the stories which in more recent times have gathered around the "Lone Mariner" who in his day skip-



pered some thirteen sloops and schooners, sans a crew. Only once or twice did he consent to take a man "Friday" on a voyage and these trips brought him to grief. At the age of 13, when his father kept the hotel at Gurnet Light, he ran his father's boats to accommodate guests. He sailed the coast alone for fifty years, and at the age of eighty-two skippered a 96-ton Packet from Nantucket to Gloucester.

The story of his "Ghost Ship," the Robert P. King, is well known. After sailing her for some years with "the silent passenger" he sold the craft to a Cape Cod captain who, a year later, rushed up to him in Boston and in a threatening manner accused Captain Hall of selling him a "haunted" ship.

The keel of his last ship, the "George Smith," visible at low tide near the mouth of the Blue Fish River, tells the story of mischievous Duxbury boys burning his ship over a generation ago.

Captain Myles Standish symbolized the Scriptural injunction, "Conquer the Earth and subdue it." He and John Alden came over from Plymouth in 1630. What would have been the fate of the whole Pilgrim colony without him!

His home site presented a commanding view of sea and land, with Plymouth across the bay.

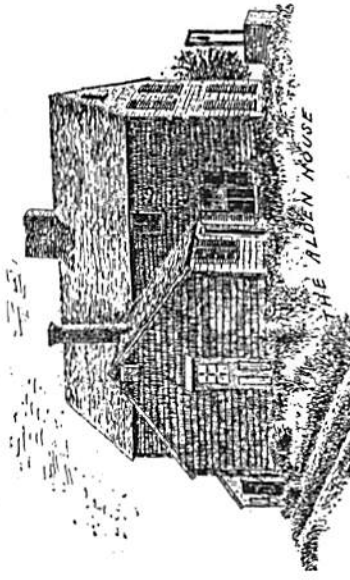
Perhaps his spring just above the tidal reach was the compelling attraction. Strange to relate, the spring flowed faithfully through the centuries until it was finally destroyed April 14, 1851, in the same storm that wrecked the Minot Ledge Lighthouse.

The monument to Myles Standish was first started as a project before 1870. Stephen M. Allen, a descendant, bought land on Captain's Hill and then suggested the idea of a monument to the glorious captain. It was not completed until 1898. The height of the monument is 116 feet from foundation to parapet and the statue itself atop is 14 feet. The Captain faces East across the bay.

A recent writer has suggested that second only to the fame of Standish is that of the Duxbury Clam, known far and wide, eulogized by such notables as Daniel Webster who insisted often in serving his friends his own specialty, Duxbury Clam Chowder.

When the immortal Myles Standish in stone first scanned the bay from the summit of the high

monument, surely a myriad host of these delicious bivalves hailed the Chieftain at low tide on the shores, but today they appear few and far apart.



The Alden House is one of Duxbury's most inviting attractions. Here John Alden chose the meadow with its bubbling spring and stream later called Blue Fish River. The distance between the Alden Farm and the Standish Homestead, high on the hill side, did not indicate a lack of fellowship as sometimes said.

Longfellow's romantic poem, The Courtship of Myles Standish, was based on a narrative by Timothy Alden published just a century and a

half ago. Some scholars question its historicity, but Timothy Alden was a great scholar of the Alden tradition and the legend has survived. Timothy, writing in 1814, stated that the only

Write the Word of God

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In view of the fact that the Government has been unable to obtain the necessary funds to carry out its policy, it is now necessary to consider the possibility of a loan from the United States Government.

McGraw-Hill

[illegible]

Cotton, 2 yds & half to a cent.
Hemp.
Flaxen.
Woolen.
S Kiver.
Mosses Green.
2 yds & half of Cotton.
5
Pound.

1

16

remnant left of the Alden habitat in Duxbury were the ruins of his well.

Frequent storms led John Alden and his sons to find higher ground. In the summer of 1635 the Duxbury area was devastated by a terrific hurricane. Corn fields were flattened by high seas and the Indians took to the tall trees. Without question, this spurred the settlers to buy lands to the west from the Indians. The photographic copy of the Indian deed of 1649, the oldest Indian deed in existence, signed by Myles Standish, Samuel Nash, Constant Southworth and the mark of Ousamequin is on display at the Duxbury Historical Society.

In Duxbury and Plymouth, for many generations, speculation has arisen as to the exact location of the graves of the Pilgrims. In Plymouth, many of the early graves were near the shore. After the hurricane of 1635 properties by the shore were less inviting. Few of the Pilgrim graves have been fully certified.

Thacher tells us the Pilgrims buried their dead, the first winter, on the banks of the shore. Later these graves were leveled and seeded over by the settlers to conceal the extent of their loss from

the Indians. Some of the graves near the shore were washed out by severe storms.

In Duxbury much difference exists as to the exact location of the first burial ground. Justin Winsor, Duxbury's most noted historian, declared it was near the shore. He was supported in his conclusions by Stephen M. Allen, historian and a leading sponsor for the building of the Myles Standish monument, also by Alden Bradford in the 1793 publication of the Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, wherein he wrote that the second Meeting House was a mile from the first, "which was near the water." Perhaps the future generations will locate the First Meeting House site and its nearby grave yard.

For the Pilgrims it seems that religious sentiment suggested that the grave was a temporary resting place, awaiting the sound of the archangel's trumpet. Here also was "no continuing city" in the language of Scripture. On the other hand, Pilgrims like Standish believed in conquering the earth by subduing it and establishing new frontiers. Yes, the Bible without question motivated the thoughts and minds of the Pilgrims and a great multitude of their descendants.

